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Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford Pilots Successful Food Service Manager Course for Adult Learners

Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford piloted a ServSafe Food Protection Manager course for students in its adult education center this spring. The course aims to help adults who are English language learners or otherwise struggle with reading prepare for the certification exam, which is the industry standard for all Connecticut restaurants. Certification can open the door to a higher paying job with benefits, but preparing for the exam can be a challenge for adults who struggle with literacy.

“Many of our students work in entry-level jobs in the food service industry while attending classes,” said LVGH Executive Director Stephen Morris. “We want to help them build sustainable careers as they gain experience in the field and improve their literacy skills. So we focused on the certification exam and how best to set them up for success.”

LVGH’s Career Navigator Kathy Sweeney prepared the course curriculum in consultation with chef and certified ServSafe instructor Jim Rogers of Rogers Food Safety. Together, they created a sixteen-hour course spread over four weeks. “All the required sections are covered,” Rogers said. “We just extended the time frame and broke down the topics into smaller, more easily digestible portions. This helped the students, and it also made it a lot more fun to teach,” he added.



Cecilia emigrated from Peru and has been a student in LVGH’s English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program for several years. Their Career Pathways team encouraged her to earn the ServSafe Food Handler’s certification early on, which helped Cecilia get her first job in the food service industry. “Working in food service is a challenge but I like it. Growing up, I saw my mother and father cooking together, one is chopping the onion, the other is boiling the potatoes and it’s how I learned to cook. I love it,” she said.



Cecilia took a cake-decorating class that led to a job in a bakery at a local supermarket. The job was great for a couple of years, but Cecilia is ready to pursue a full time position with benefits. She was one of the first students to sign up for the course. “The teachers and staff at LVGH believe in me, they encourage me and they challenge me,” Cecilia said. “They gave me the opportunity to demonstrate that I can do things. Many of us, many of the people who come to this country, the only thing we ask is for the opportunity. Give us the opportunity and trust us, push us, give us right steps.”

The cohort also included two participants from The Open Hearth, a shelter for men experiencing homelessness which has had a long partnership with LVGH. Shawn works in Open Hearth’s kitchen. “I like working in food service because I like the people and I really like to cook,” he explained. “The course was great because it helped me further my education in the field. Chef Jim talked to us like a chef, not like a teacher, so I could relate. I’m not traditionally a big studier. We had a refresher every week on what we studied in the last class, and then we would build every week on what we’d done.”

James, Open Hearth’s Kitchen Manager, also enjoyed the class. “I learned so much, and the certification is really important to my job,” he said.



The students took the certification exam on June 1st. All of them passed on the first try. “We’re so proud of them,” said Morris. “They worked hard to learn all the requirements of a manager and, when combined with their kitchen experience, they are ready for better paying, leadership roles in restaurants, school cafeterias, and other professional kitchens,” Morris said.

LVGH is planning additional certification courses in the hospitality and maintenance industries. “Our students are some of the hardest working, resilient people you will ever meet. With just a little extra help, they can do so much to build a better future for themselves, their families, and for our local economy.” For more information about Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford’s programs, please call: 860.233.3853.